



## STATE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION STAFF LEGISLATIVE BILL ANALYSIS

Date Amended:	4/11/02	Bill No:	SB 1631
Tax:	Property	Author:	Morrow
Board Position:		Related Bills:	

### BILL SUMMARY

This bill would specify that rental housing located on leased land on a military base, as specified, is not a possessory interest because it lacks the element of independence.

### ANALYSIS

#### Current Law

Revenue and Taxation Code Section 107 sets forth the three essential elements that must exist to find that a person's use of publicly owned tax-exempt property rises to a level of a taxable possessory interest. Those elements are independence, durability and exclusivity.

With respect to the element of independence, Revenue and Taxation Code Section 107(a)(1) defines "independent" to mean "the ability to exercise authority and exert control over the management or operation of the property or improvements, separate and apart from the policies, statutes, ordinances, rules, and regulations of the public owner of the property or improvements. A possession or use is independent if the possession or operation of the property is sufficiently autonomous<sup>1</sup> to constitute more than a mere agency."

The case law and Property Tax Rule 20, a regulation, additionally require that a "private benefit" must be provided to the possessor. "Private benefit" means "that the possessor has the opportunity to make a profit, or to use or be provided an amenity, or to pursue a private purpose in conjunction with its use of the possessory interest. The use should be of some private or economic benefit to the possessor that is not shared by the general public."

#### Proposed Law

This bill would add Section 107.4 to the Revenue and Taxation Code to provide that a possession or use of land or improvements is not independent if that possession or use is pursuant to a contract, including, but not limited to, a long-term lease, for the private construction, rehabilitation, management, or maintenance of housing for active duty

<sup>1</sup> Property Tax Rule 20 specifies that to be "sufficiently autonomous" to constitute more than a mere agency, the possessor must have the right and ability to exercise significant authority and control over the management or operation of the real property, separate and apart from the policies, statutes, ordinances, rules, and regulations of the public owner of the real property.

### REVISED REVENUE ESTIMATE

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military personnel and their dependents, if the housing units meet all of the following criteria:

- The housing units are contained entirely within the confines of a federal military reservation.
- The housing units do not use city or county emergency services.
- The military determines the number and nature of housing units
- The military exercises control over the choice of tenants allowed that may rent the housing units.
- The military determines the rent that may be charged for the housing units.

An interest that is not “independent” fails one of the three elements that must exist in order for the interest to be subject to property tax. Thus, the housing units would not be subject to property taxation.

### **In General**

In certain instances a property tax assessment may be levied when a person or entity uses publicly owned real property that, with respect to its public owner, is either immune or exempt from property taxation. These uses are commonly referred to as “possessory interests” and are typically found where an individual or entity leases, rents or uses federal, state or local government facilities and/or land.

Revenue and Taxation Code Section 107 establishes parameters within which assessors and judicial authorities are to determine the existence of taxable possessory interests. Generally, those determinations are made according to the facts and circumstances in each individual case.

### **Background**

Under the Military Housing Privatization Initiative (MHPI) Act authorized by Congress in 1996, the military has started to privatize on-base family housing units. Although the specifics of the implementation plans developed by the Army, the Air Force and the Navy, including the Marine Corps, vary, the basic framework is similar.

- Lease land to private contractor/developer for 50 years.
- Convey existing family housing units and infrastructure to the contractor/developer for replacement or renovation.
- Contractor/developer to build additional family housing units, as required.
- Contractor/developer will be responsible for property management, including repairs and maintenance.
- Tenant costs including utilities may not exceed basic allowance for housing (BAH).
- At the end of the contract, the military authority will own the housing units.

The Military Housing Privatization Initiative is managed by the Competitive Sourcing and Privatization (CS&P) Office, in the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense

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(Installations and Environment). The Department of Defense maintains an extensive website on the program at [www.defenselink.mil/acq/installation/hrso](http://www.defenselink.mil/acq/installation/hrso).

Much of the existing military housing stock is in poor condition and housing has been identified as a source of retention difficulties faced by the military.

#### COMMENTS:

1. **Sponsor and Purpose.** This bill is sponsored by De Luz Family Housing. The author's background sheet explains the purpose of the bill as follows:

**PROBLEM:** As a result of the long-term lease, which is necessary for the contractor to obtain financing, under the current interpretation of California law a possessory interest is created. This interest is taxable in the same manner as privately held property. The taxes, which can be substantial, reduce the amount of revenue from the project and hence reduce both the construction funds that can be financed and the funds necessary for maintenance. This appears to be an unintended consequence of the MHPI. The result is that contractors will not be able to build housing units to as high a standard as they otherwise would. And maintenance funds will suffer threatening the quality of life of residents.

**SOLUTION:** The solution is to clarify existing law as to the definition of possessory interest. In order for a possessory interest to be created it must be deemed to be independent, durable and exclusive. While it can be argued that the interest created under the MHPI is none of these, the courts have said that legislative clarification is needed. Currently, based on an earlier military leasing act (Military Leasing Act of 1947), the courts are considering such interests to be taxable. SB 1631 redefines "independence" under the definition of "possessory interest" to specifically address situations where the military has primary control over the project.

Additionally, the author states that this bill would not harm local government finances because with respect to the existing housing stock that has been conveyed to private developers and will be replaced or renovated, that housing stock was not previously subject to property tax when owned directly by the military. With respect to the impact of new housing, the author states that local governments will not be negatively impacted because emergency services are to be provided by the base and schools would be compensated by Federal Impact Aid. The author states that, in fact, on-base housing will likely result in a positive impact to local governments because of reduced traffic congestion and reduced demand for other public services (police, fire, emergency medical, housing subsidies, etc.) by having fewer military families living off base.

2. **To date, two projects under the Military Housing Privatization Initiative have been awarded in California with potentially five more projects to be awarded.** The awardee/developer/general partner of the two projects have been Hunt Building Corp. (El Paso, Texas) for Camp Pendleton, Phase 1 and Lincoln Property Co.

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(Dallas, Texas) and Clark Realty Capital (Bethesda, Maryland), LLC for the Naval Complex. Both of these projects are located in San Diego County.

3. **San Diego County has assessed a possessory interest in the Camp Pendleton project (De Luz Family Housing).** The developer has filed an appeal on the value of the property that is pending review by the assessment appeals board. The original construction of the De Luz homes in the early 1950's was the focus a landmark California Supreme Court decision on the valuation method applied to possessory interests: *De Luz Homes, Inc. v. County of San Diego*, (1955) 45 Cal.2d 546. In 1949, Congress approved the Wherry Housing Program that was intended to bring private homebuilders into the rental housing market for military personnel without using military construction funding. The original De Luz homes were constructed under this program. Under the program, a developer acquired a land lease in 1952 and built housing rented to military families at Camp Pendleton which was subsequently subject to property taxation as a possessory interest. The *De Luz* possessory interest case was not about whether the developer had a taxable possessory interest in the property in the first instance, but rather how to properly value the possessory interest. Apparently, congressional concerns with "windfall" profits accruing to private developers under the program led to its effective termination in 1955, and beginning in 1957 the military began purchasing the homes constructed by private developers under the program. Thus, because Wherry housing was eventually purchased by the military (which is immune from state-imposed property tax), the military housing built under that program, including the De Luz homes, have not been subject to property tax in California until the recent conveyance to a private developer in 2000 under the 1996 Military Housing Privatization Initiative program. See CRS Report for Congress, "Military Housing Privatization Initiative: Background and Issues, July 2, 2001: <http://www.defenselink.mil/acq/installation/hrso/refdoc.htm>
4. **Other privately owned military housing on leased military property is currently subject to a possessory interest tax.** Since 1991, Ventura County has levied a possessory interest tax on 300 military residential housing units for rent to military personnel on land leased by the Navy at Port Hueneme, California to the private contractor. This housing was built under the Section 801 Housing Program (a build-to-lease guarantee to the property developer) approved by Congress in 1984. In addition to the recent taxation of a possessory interest in San Diego County and the possessory interest in Ventura County, other counties may also have been assessing possessory interests in other privately operated military housing located on military bases.
5. **Independence.** To qualify as a possessory interest, the right to use property must be sufficiently exclusive, durable and independent of the public owner to constitute **more than an agency**. *Pacific Grove-Asilomar Operating Corp. v. County of Monterey* (1974) 43 Cal.App.3d 675, 684. "If, in practical effect, one of the parties has the right to exercise complete control over the operation, an agency relationship exists;..." (*Nichols v. Arthur Murray, Inc.* (1967) 284 Cal. App.2d). Pacific

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Grove-Asilomar Operating Corp is a nonprofit corporation organized under the laws of the State of California solely for the purpose of managing for and on behalf of the Department of Parks and Recreation, State of California, the real property and all improvements on the "Asilomar Conference Grounds." In the *Pacific Grove* case, the Court found that an agency was created by the agreement there in question; the court concluded that Asilomar's management of the property was not independent, but subject to state control in every way. To date, that decision appears to be one of the few possessory interest cases in which an appellate court has concluded that an agency relationship existed.

6. **If it is determined that the contractor's interest rises to the level of a taxable possessory interest, then any restrictions, such as the restrictions on the rent that may be charged, must be reflected in the value of the possessory interest.** Section 402.1 provides that in the assessment of land, the assessor must consider the effect upon the value of any enforceable restrictions to which the use of the land may be subjected. For instance, the military will restrict the contractor's use and possession of the land and improvements and will restrict the contractor's right to set rental fees on the land and the improvements. These restrictions must be considered by the assessor in valuing the land and improvements. See BOE Annotated Letter 660.0171: [http://www.boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/pdf/660\\_0171.pdf](http://www.boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/pdf/660_0171.pdf)
7. **Prior Constitutional Considerations.** Legislation to exempt various possessory interests by statute has been often argued to be an "unconstitutional" exemption of real property. It is claimed that the appropriate course of action is to instead seek the approval of the voters of California by proposing a constitutional amendment to exempt the particular class of real property from property taxation. Therefore, some may argue that this legislation, if enacted, would similarly constitute an "unconstitutional" exemption of real property. However, in *City of San Jose v. Carlson* (1997) 57 Cal.App. 4th 1348, the court acknowledged the appropriateness of Legislative action to set parameters on the element of durability. A similar rationale could be made for this bill, with respect to the element of independence. The Sixth District Court of Appeals in *City of San Jose* invited the Legislature to establish some statutory standards in measuring durability, the court stated:

"Although we agree that the element of durability seems to have been 'diluted to a degree of almost nonexistence' (*United Airlines, Inc. v. County of San Diego* (1991) [cite omitted]), the Legislature has not seen fit to reverse the growing trend toward finding taxable possessory interests in short-term uses, even in its most recent amendments to Section 107. If there is a sound basis for distinguishing between a second time user and a third time user of government-owned property for purposes of identifying a taxable possessory interest, **it is within the province of the Legislature to clarify the parameters of that interest in terms of frequency, duration, and length of time between uses.**" [Emphasis added.]

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8. **The MHPI provides advantages for the military and provides venture capital opportunities for the private sector.** There is a private or economic benefit to the private sector developers that ultimately seek and win the contract to build, rehabilitate and manage the housing units on military bases. The Department of Defense notes: "The Military Housing Privatization Initiative helps to promote a mutually beneficial relationship between the Department of Defense and the private sector. For the Department of Defense, it results in the construction of more housing built to market standards, for less money than through the military construction process. Commercial construction is not only faster and less costly than military construction, but private sector funds significantly stretch and leverage the Department's limited housing funds. There are also significant venture capital opportunities in DOD housing for developers and financiers in the private sector. Privatization opens the military construction market to a greater number of housing projects can provide a continuous inflow of capital to an investor over a long period of time."
9. **This bill does not require that any property tax savings generated will ultimately inure to the benefit of the military personnel living in the residences.** Other sections of law extending a property tax exemption require that the savings inure to the worthy organization in question. See for example, Section 206.2 related to property leased to churches and Section 202.2 for property leased to free libraries and museums.
10. **If this bill passes and the possessory interest to the developer/operator is exempted from property tax, the military personnel that live in homes would not subsequently be assessed a taxable possessory interest directly.** Some governmental employees who reside in tax exempt governmentally owned property, for example forest service employees, are assessed a possessory interest directly. However, active duty military personnel are not subject to such taxable possessory interests. In 1980, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in *United States v. Humboldt County* 628 F.2d 549 held that the occupancy of rent-free housing to military personnel on base at Beale Air Force Base in Yuba County and off-base near Centerville Beach Naval Facility in Humboldt County was not durable nor did it confer a private benefit to the military personnel and thus not a taxable possessory interest.

## **COST ESTIMATE**

The Board would incur some minor absorbable costs in informing and advising county assessors, the public, and staff of the change in law.

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**REVENUE ESTIMATE****Background, Methodology, and Assumptions**

Under this proposal, MHPI projects would not be treated as taxable possessory interests.

According to the Department of Defense, the privatization projects awarded or in planning for California are:

<b>Branch</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Award Date</b>
Marine	Camp Pendleton (Phase I)	712 housing units (with 512 existing and 200 new)	November 2000
Navy	Naval Complex San Diego (Phase 2)	3,248 housing units (with 2,660 existing and 588 new)	August 2001
Army	Presidio of Monterey POM Ord Naval Postgraduate School	1,675 housing units 87 including 37 historical 1588 601 housing units	February 2003 (target)
Army	Fort Irwin Fort Irwin Moffett Federal Airfield Camp Parks	2,052 housing units 690 housing units 13 housing units	April 2003 (target)
Air Force	Beale AFB	1,444 housing units (with 1,553 existing; 109 demolished)	March 2003 (target)
Navy	Naval Complex San Diego (Phase 2)	4,981 housing units	pending
Marine	Camp Pendleton (Phase 2)	3,595 housing units	pending
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19,011 housing units</b>	completed by 2010

The De Luz family housing area in Camp Pendleton was privatized in November 2000. According to the San Diego County Assessor's Office, the total assessed value for 2001 for the taxable possessory interest for the 512 existing housing units amounted to \$35 million. Families started moving into some of the 200 homes being built in the area in October 2001. The new homes that were completed in 2001, along with the Naval Complex San Diego project, comprising 2,660 housing units, will be assessed as possessory interests on the 2002 roll. However, according to the sponsor, the housing units in the Naval Complex San Diego projects will utilize city and county emergency services and therefore will be ineligible for the provisions of this bill. Consequently, those units could be taxable possessory interests under this proposal.

For the purposes of this estimate, the initial valuation of the possessory interest for the De Luz/Pendleton homes will be used to estimate the valuation and revenue impact of

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all of the privatization projects currently planned for California. The average assessed value per privatized housing unit is \$35 million/ 512, or \$68,000.

After subtracting the Naval Complex San Diego units, the estimated total assessed value for all of the projects is then:  $(19,011 - 3,248 - 4,981) \times \$68,000$ , or \$733 million.

### Revenue Summary

The annual revenue impact at the basic one percent property tax rate this bill is estimated to be \$733 million x 1 percent, or \$7.33 million, by 2010.

Assuming that this proposal would first be effective for the 2003 lien date, the revenue impact for the first three years can be estimated as follows:

Year	Estimated Assessed Value	Tax Rate	Property Tax
2003	712 x \$68,000 = \$48.4 million	x 1%	\$484,000
2004/2005	7187 x \$68,000 = \$488.7 million	x 1%	\$4.89 million

### Qualifying Remarks

This estimate measures the impact of this bill for the military housing privatized under the MHPI only. There are other housing projects that could be affected by this bill. For instance, the possessory interest in Ventura County has an assessed value of roughly \$19.5 million, resulting in property taxes of \$195,000 at the 1% tax rate.

The impact of this proposal may be smaller if any of the housing units—other than the Naval Complex San Diego project units—currently scheduled for privatization under MHPI utilize city or county emergency services or are not contained entirely within the confines of a federal military reservation.

MHPI deals only with the privatization of family housing units. Depending on the success of the MHPI privatization plans, the military may decide to privatize bachelor-housing quarters as well. The revenue impact of this proposal would increase significantly if bachelor housing quarters were privatized.

Analysis prepared by:	Rose Marie Kinnee	(916) 445-6777	5/03/02
Revenue prepared by:	Aileen Takaha Lee	(916) 445-0840	
Contact:	Margaret S. Shedd	(916) 322-2376	

1631-2rk revised revenue estimate

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